UNDISCOVERED POWERS IN MAN & NATURE

by **N. Sri Ram**

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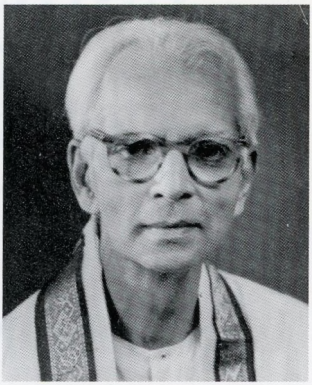
N SRI RAM

Biographical information



From 1953, at the age of 62, until his death in 1973, Nilikanta Sri Ram was President of The Theosophical Society, Adyar. The father of Radha Burnier, he joined The Theosophical Society in 1908 and graduated from Madras University in 1909. Before taking on the position of president, Sri Ram had taught in different theosophical schools and was Assistant Editor of *The Leader* of Allahabad, then the most influential newspaper in North India. For many years he assisted the Society's 2nd president, Annie Besant in editing her political newspaper New India and her weekly journal *The Commonwealth.* Later he was co-editor with the Society's 4th president, George Arundale, of the weekly journal *Conscience.*

Mr Sri Ram was also Dr Besant's private secretary for four years, Treasurer and, later Recording Secretary of the Theosophical Society and its Vice-President. A prolific lecturer, he spoke in all Commonwealth countries, and throughout Europe, the U. S. A., Latin America and the Far East. For his contribution to theosophical literature he was honoured with presentation of the Subba Row Medal in 1951. Published works by N Sri Ram include *Seeking Wisdom; An Approach to Reality; Life's Deeper Aspects; Man, His Origins and Evolution; and Thoughts for Aspirants.*

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UNDISCOVERED POWERS IN MAN & NATURE

THE THIRD OBJECT of the Theosophical Society reads:

To investigate unexplained Laws of nature and the powers latent in man.

First of all, is the word 'unexplained' the right word in this context? Should it really be 'undiscovered'? 'Unexplained' implies that we have already identified the laws, that we perceive their existence but that they have not been explained because of some obscurity in them or because of their complex or complicated nature. 'Undiscovered' would carry only the presumption that there are laws unknown to us at present.

The field of the Third Object suggests an openness to exploration, of the uncommon or seemingly miraculous such as the phenomena which H. P. Blavatsky produced in her time. In her first work, *Isis Unveiled*, H.P.B. ranges over a vast area covering almost everything out of the ordinary - clairvoyance of various sorts, astral travelling, feats of levitation, psychometry (reading the mysteries of the past), intercourse with the dead and other non-physical entities, materializations, the passage of matter and so forth. Perhaps we could include in these studies the rationale of astrology not the art of astrology or the practice of it but rather the theory which underlies the significance of the zodiacal signs and planets, their positions and relationships, the attribution to them of certain influences on our lives and the events that take place in the world.

THE ORION CONSTELLATION
as depicted in *The Orion Mystery*
by Robert Bauval and Adrian Gilbert.
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All this is beyond what we can see directly for ourselves but, while it may be interesting as a matter of study, it cannot, I think really come under the description of Theosophy as the Divine wisdom. We must not confuse knowledge, even of the occult side of nature, with wisdom, which springs from the depths of a certain nature in ourselves. It would, for example, be useful to know how to reverse gravity. Even if we were to find out, it would not necessarily make us wise in any real sense.

Although the Third Object speaks of 'Laws' and 'Powers' much of the work accomplished through these powers is purely descriptive. For instance, literature concerning the astral and mental planes, the etheric body, the chakras, and so forth, reads like the description of some extraordinary region and of the activities taking place there. It is said sometimes that we do not pay much attention to the Third Object, but we must realize that these days investigation of this kind requires people trained to undertake it, and even then their competence and findings cannot easily be proved to others. There will always be room therefore for scepticism and for difference of opinion. A psychic or clairvoyant may be seeing only projections from his own subconscious mind, visualizing forms created out of his own ideas.

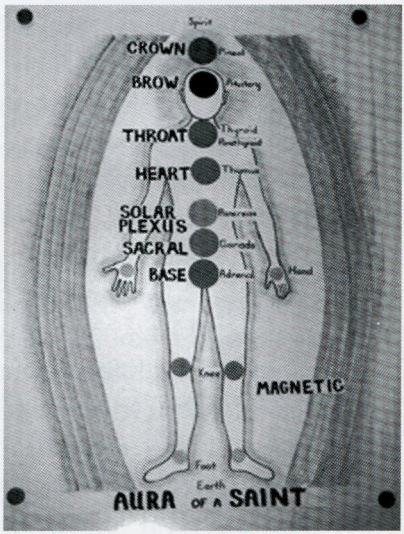

photo by Colyn Boyce

It is only people who have the necessary training and faculties who can undertake serious investigation, as distinguished from mere study of what others have said on the subject. As because what the seers or investigators (competent in different degrees) say is not open to verification by most people, we have to judge it with our own reason and understanding.

The work of the Third Object, in the sense of investigating the unexplained and the latent, can therefore be undertaken only by individuals on their own responsibility - or occasionally by a team - and not by the Society as a whole. Neither C. W. Leadbeater, nor even H. P. Blavatsky, was officially commissioned to undertake any such task; they pursued their investigations on their own initiative and published the results of their researches for the benefit of all.

H. P. Blavatsky & C. W. Leadbeater

Of course we can interpret the Third Object to include such activities as are carried out by the Society for Psychical Research. But there seems to be no point in The Theosophical Society duplicating the work of such a body, any more than it should duplicate the activities of scientists, whose activities are also concerned with truth or aspect of the truth. Nor, in spite of what some people say, do I think it would be wise for us to conduct yoga classes to arouse kundalini, stimulate the chakras, or do anything of that sort. These practices are known to harm rather than help those who take part in them. Similarly, it is not our business to engage in activities of a spiritualistic nature, even if some good results could be obtained thereby.

The Society's aims are philanthropic and spiritual in essence, and we must keep those aims steadily in view and not cause confusion in the minds of people between spirituality and psychism. We must be careful not to invest the Society with a character that does not belong to it by identifying it with psychic pursuits of different sorts.

In the East- especially in India- the great spiritual teachers have always looked upon the possession of psychic powers in general as a liability rather than an asset on the path of spiritual progress. Whether or not that is so depends upon who possesses them and the use he makes of them, the kind of person he is and his motives. In any case,

the **seeking** of such powers- which is usually out of motives that tend towards the sensational even when they are not actually selfish- becomes a distraction from the discovery of the truth about oneself. We may, of course, consider and discuss what is given out by someone who possesses these powers; we can investigate their findings at the intellectual level and individual Lodges may engage in this work. This kind of investigation is really the widening of the field of scientific and philosophical observation and thought.

HOW IT GREW AND CHANGED

There have been several versions of the Third Object, and these throw light upon the leading people in the society as it developed. When the society was started in 1875 its bye-laws simply state: 'The Objects of the Society are to collect and diffuse a Knowledge of the laws which govern the universe'. There is no mention at all of Brotherhood; the idea of Brotherhood appears for the first time in the history of the Society in 1878. The question of whether Brotherhood or Occultism, in the ordinary sense of the term, should be the primary Object was a matter of discussion between the Adepts and those with whom they corresponded, namely, A. P. Sinnett and A. O. Hume.

A. P. Sinnett and A. O. Hume

In 1878 , activities commenced in England with the formation of the British Theosophical Society. This Society declared that it was founded ' for the purpose of discovering the nature and powers of the human soul and spirit by investigation and experiment' - an ambitious undertaking apparently adopted without any clear idea of what it involved. In February 1880, the General Council of the Society formu-

lated certain Objects which correspond to the present Third Object:

Firstly : **To keep alive in man the spiritual intuitions**.

(It was not stated how that was going to be attempted.)

Secondly: **To oppose and counteract after due investigation and proof of its irrational nature, bigotry in every form, whether as as intolerant religious sectarianism or belief in miracles or anything supernatural.**

Thirdly: **To seek to obtain knowledge of all the laws of nature and aid in diffusing it; and especially to encourage the study of those laws least understood by modern people and so termed the Occult Sciences**.

(I do not know whether the words 'all of' were put in advisedly, or whether it was because of the tendency of all of us to speak in unqualified terms exceeding what we actually mean.)

In 1883 and also in 1884 modifications of these objects were adopted by different Lodges to suit their ideas and fancies. It seems that they could do so because the parent Society was not organised sufficiently to guide them nor had the aims been generally agreed upon and fixed at that time.There was the Himalayan Theosophical Society , for instance, which regarded itself as a rather superior body. It included A.P. Sinnett and A.O. Hume, and its objects were stated in these terms:

Firstly, **Universal Brotherhood**

(Apparently this was put in as a concession to the Adepts who insisted upon Brotherhood as the primary aim.)

Secondly, **The union of the individual Monad with the Infinite and Absolute**

(an aim laudable enough, but permitting some doubt as to whether those who formulated it had any idea of the actual nature of what was proposed.)

Then *Thirdly*, (and this sounds almost common place after the second grandiose aim)

The study of the hidden mysteries of Nature and the development of the psychical powers latent in man.

The London Lodge (which was a very active and important body in the early history of the Society when Mr Sinnett was associated with it) formulated the objects as follows:

The investigation of the nature of existence, with a view to the comprehension and realization of the higher potentialities of man, and the revival of research connected with occult science and esoteric philosophy.

The inclusion of the phrase 'the nature of of existence' seems to be also an indication of the vagueness as to what was to be investigated that was found in a number of groups at that time. Also we may note that a distinction is made here between Occult Science and esoteric philosophy, or perhaps the phrases were used to refer to two different sides of the same undertaking.

In the annual report of 1885, ten years after the foundation, the following statement appeared:

The Third Object, pursued by a portion of the members of the Society, is to investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the psychical powers of man.

The First Object was very much as at present, but the Second Object, instead of speaking of comparative religion, philosophy and science, speaks of 'Aryan and other Eastern religions and philosophies'. In 1890, we find the Third Object reduced to a near approximation of its present form:

To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the physic powers latent in man!

C Jinarajadasa

Later the word psychic was omitted and the object was put in the form in which it is today C. Jinarajadasa in *The Golden Book of the Theosophical Society*, makes the following comment on these different versions: "It was merely the outer form that had to find an adequate expression through the various changes."

H.P.B. in *The Key to Theosophy*, makes a clear distinction between a Theosophist and an occultist. "The latter", she says, "is concerned with the hidden processes in Nature, the secret potency of things in Nature". In an article entitled *Recent Progress in Theosophy* - apparently the article was written at about the same time - she explained: '

> **The Third Object, pursued by a portion of the fellows of the Society, is to investigate the unexplained laws of Nature and the psychic nature of man. There are two general objects and one restricted object of attention. Only a portion of our fellows occupy themselves with the occult properties of matter and the psychical powers of man.**

"The Society as a whole," she wrote further, "is not concerned with this branch of research, and naturally, for, out of every 10,000 people one may meet, the chances are that but a very small minority have the time, taste, or ability to take up such delicate and baffling studies. We thought it was a good thing to proclaim this line of research and self-discovery as the third of our three Objects. For those who are interested in it and inquirers whom they can reach and encourage the mystical philosophical books of the present and former times have been written."

H. P. B. did not regard the mystical philosophical works of the past as outdated by later writings, unlike some. . . . who think that what we call theosophical literature has completely superceded all earlier works, sometimes called 'historical Theosophy'. Interestingly, she includes 'self-discovery' under the Third Object: that is work in which all of us can engage.

CRITERIA OF TRUTH

I would like to consider here the kind of mind that is needed for the study of Occultism. For this study, as for the investigation of any aspect of truth, there must be a mind which is truthful in the strictest sense; a mind that does not prevaricate, does not gloss over things the truth of which has no preconceived vested interest or deceive itself. These prerequisites are demanding but it is a fact that before we can study Occultism in earnest and make a success of it we have to have that kind of mind.

We might also consider the question of what might be regarded as valid knowledge, that maybe applied. Obviously, what is perceived or experienced by a person is an item of knowledge to him not necessarily an absolute proof of the truth he may imagine it to be but true as far as it goes. The nature of the thing may be quite different from the way I see it, in any case, it will probably have various aspects which are not evident to me.

Therefore it is not the whole truth which I experience. Yet, as a perception that has come to me, as evidence, it has it's own significance. Also, when we register certain facts, the relations between them - the inferences which we draw from our perceptions - have obviously a validity on the same plane as the perceptions themselves. It may have more validity as a process of thought, for the premises may be wrong while the reasoning is right. Then we may accept provisionally statements coming from what we consider to be knowledgeable sources. Here the question would arise as to whether the source **is** really trustworthy regarding the matters in question.

There are statements in *The Mahatma Letters*, which are accepted by many members of The Theosophical Society because they have reason to be believe that this knowledge comes from a source which is very reliable in these matters. Apart from all this, it is also legiti-

mate to frame hypotheses which are consonant with facts and explain them. In Science there is a continuous framing of theories and equations and later amendments of them. We may entertain a theory because it appears to be the best explanation we can find, but we must equate it with absolute truth. To accept it temporarily on that basis seems as perfectly legitimate for then it does not diminish the freedom to progress towards a larger truth.

We must say a word about intuition - a much misunderstood word. Real intuition is either an undistorted perception springing from, or a creation by, the total consciousness. To include it as a form of knowing does not seem to me to be unscientific. Before the faculty of true intuition can come into play there must be a cessation of wishful thinking and the mind must be clear of preconceived ideas; there must be discipline in one's thinking, not deviation into pleasant paths.

To go off into fantasies of different kinds is a kind of indulgence; to come to the truth we should have that quality of austerity which guards us from the propensity to indulge what is, for the time being, comforting and pleasant.

LAWS OF DIFFERENT CATEGORIES

The Laws of Nature are of different classes. First there are the laws of matter in their different grades, whether cognized by our senses or beyond their limited range. Then there are laws which belong to the nature of life, it's characteristics, it's action and evolution. There are the laws of the mind, of psychology and the psyche. To these I would add the laws of harmony which form a complete branch of the wider subject, involving the intuitive perception of harmonics and discords in many different fields. There is no tangible way of proving

to another one's own experience. It is by an intuitive perception that one knows or feels the harmony in sounds, colours or movements.

Then there is such a thing as the laws of one's own inner being or spirit. There are laws that function in several different levels of existence. The law of karma, for example, in one aspect is mechanical and invariable, and in another is moral and involves the concept of justice. Somehow these two aspects are co-ordinated in Karma as we understand it.

I mentioned the law of the spirit. The question may be asked: Is not the nature and the action of the spirit identified with freedom? Can you speak of law when you refer to freedom? But let us consider this fact; the action of this most interior principle of the spirit results every time in a perfect creation; and what is perfect or perfectly constructed always embodies a law. For instance, there may be a perfect musical composition or a perfectly shaped vase.

Both were brought into existence through the artistic sense. But if you examine them with another type of mind, you will find certain concrete laws embodied in their construction. The artist, without going through a process of thought, has embodied a form of law in the creation which he produces and the law which is embodied is always a law of harmony. So we may say of a creation by the Spirit that it follows the law of it's own being.

Everywhere in nature there are laws, but there is also freedom, for nature - including man - is a mixture of spirit and matter, or, to use the Sanskrit words *purusha* and *prakriti*. *Prakriti* is that which has come into existence by a process, *purusha* is externally one and undifferentiated; it is the energy that exists always but periodically electrifies the roots of matter.

The Atman - the universal spiritual principle that is at the base of that energy - is omnipresent; every manifestation of it has an aspect

of eternity. This manifestation is limited, because to manifest itself, the Atman, the spark of the Divine, must be embodied in some type of vesture and it's action is limited and broken up by the vesture. That which has in it the nature of eternity can be symbolised by a circle; but the circle has to be squared within the limitations of the body of matter. That is how things are in nature. perhaps the different Platonic solids are really stages in the approximation to the sphere, which is a form of a circle and is said to be the perfect geometrical figure.

The five possible regular solids, later known as the "Platonic Bodies", which played considerable part, in subsequent philosophical and mathematical speculation

POWERS RELATED TO STATE OF BEING

Now as regards 'the powers latent in man'. If they are really latent, how are you going to investigate them? You cannot investigate that which you cannot observe; the powers must somehow to be brought out of latency before they can be studied, or handled in any manner. (We should not perhaps, be too literal - minded, but take these forms as they are generally understood.)

The powers latent in man are latent in a nature that exists as one of a number of approximations to the Ultimate, the inmost spirit At every level there is an approximation which is a certain level of being. We might, broadly speaking, divide these natures into psychic and spirit.

The constitution of man may be regarded as having a base and an apex. The apex, seen as a dimensionless point, represents the consciousness as yet untouched by any process of time, existing in that intangible moment, the present that divides the past from the future. Then there are the intermediate levels or planes between the base and the apex. When the relationship is located between the apex and the base which may be regarded as the sub-stratum of all things (*akasha*) then the relationship is spiritual. But when it is with one of the intermediate levels, then it can be spiritual or it can be psychic. There are powers appropriate to each level of being.

This is brought out by H.P. Blavatsky in a striking manner in an article on spiritual progress in which she refers to psychic powers and the work of The Theosophical Society. She points out that to become an adept one has to become

> **a new man, more perfect in every way than he is at present and, if he succeeds, his capabilities and faculties will receive a corresponding increase of range and power, just as in the visible world we find that each stage in the evolutionary scale is marked by the increase of capacity. This is how it is that the Adept becomes endowed with marvellous powers that have so often been described, but the main point to be remembered is that these powers are the natural accompaniments of existence on a higher plane of evolution, just as the ordinary human faculties are the natural accompaniments of existence on the ordinary human plane.**

People so often think of cultivating this or that power, they want to work on their solar plexus or some other centre in their bodies, but the way is entirely different. The so-called powers are really the fruitage of the living tree which is the human being. H. P. B. says further: The Society was founded to teach no new and easy paths to the acquisition of 'powers'; its only mission is to re-kindle the torch of truth, so long extinguished for all

but the very few, and to keep that truth alive by the formation of a fraternal union of mankind, the only soil in which the good seed can grow.

In this connection, we would warn all our members, and others who are seeking spiritual knowledge, to beware of persons offering to teach them easy methods of acquiring psychic gifts; such gifts are indeed comparatively easy of acquirement by artificial means, but fade out as soon as the nerve-stimulus exhausts itself. The real seership and adeptship which is accompanied by the psychic development, once reached is never lost.

In *The Mahatma Letters* there are some noteworthy statements concerning the secrets of occultism which apply to the higher psychic powers. The correspondents of the Mahatmas at that time complained that the Adepts seemed to grudge giving out the facts they knew.The Master says:

> **The truth is that till the neophyte attains to the condition necessary for that degree of illumination to which, and for which, he is entitled and fitted, most if not all of the secrets are incommunicable.**

They cannot be put into words, they cannot even be transmitted by any telepathic means, when the mind is not prepared to receive these secrets. If this were not so, all that the Adepts would have to do would be to publish a handbook of the art which might be taught in schools. That is apparently the view that many people entertain.

THIRD OBJECT; ITS SCOPE & LIMITATIONS

The study of occultism in general can do much good. It is the study of nature, taking it as a totality, not only what appears on the surface but also the hidden laws and processes. It can be marvellously enlightening when one takes it up in earnest; for then instead of seeing only the superficial aspect of things, one penetrates to the heart of existence and sees what lies behind the facade, the extension behind the appearance.

We can all engage in such a study, but to 'investigate' the hidden laws and powers requires the necessary ability. The development of such capacity is an individual affair, not the business of the Society, which cannot have schools for such development. The seeking of power if it builds up self-importance and to dominate others whether worldly power or power of a different character is dangerous.

A finding arrived at by the exercise of psychic powers may be worthy of consideration - that depends upon the person but discrimination should be reserved. When you neither accept a statement or reject it but just look at it dispassionately, you will know your own response. If you respond to the truth of it, you register that fact.

This is the attitude needed with regard to the pursuit of the Third Object. Many people find this object exceedingly vague because they have not sorted out all the implications of what they believe or refuse to believe, do not have any clear idea of what Occultism is and what is or is not acceptable. It is necessary to have in our minds a certain clarity with regard to our aims and undertakings, whether pertaining to the Third Object of the Society or anything else.

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